

# HEALTH

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## Influenza: The Disease

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus. It attacks the respiratory tract in humans (nose, throat, and lungs). The flu is different from a cold. Most people who get the flu will recover in 1 to 2 weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu. Millions of people in the United States — about 10 percent to 20 percent of U.S. residents — will get the flu each year. An average of about 20,000 people per year in the United States die from the flu, and 114,000 per year have to be admitted to the hospital as a result of influenza. Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from flu can happen at any age. People  $\geq$  65 years old, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from flu. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may have worsening of this condition that is triggered by the flu.

### The flu usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

### What You Should Do If You Get the Flu

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu

It is important to remember that in the United States, the peak of flu season can occur anywhere from late December through March.



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